Monsieur de Motair Hinon Le & Nauvantes Mais nous avon les le & your a Sircepool sen marchen, at un a Siessinton of a Vous assers que 6. un son voiage a faire nous as Low from moi of a Cross ost malare Sur land

5. Première lettre adressée par Justin Chaudoir au notaire Streel, datée d'Union, le 3 novembre 1873 (coll. étude de Streel).

Correspondence of a Walloon ancestor with his lawyer in Beauvechain, Belgium, that took place over the course of three decades. This article appeared in a publication of the Historical, Archeological and Genealogy Circle of Waver (Wavriensa/C.H.A.W publication), Belgium in 2008. Sadly only the first letter was reproduced in its original handwritten form.

The correspondence of Justin Chaudoir (1842-1908), a Belgian emigrant to Wisconsin sent to Tourinnes- la-Grosse / Beauvechain Brussels from Green Bay (Wisconsin)

As of 1853, many Walloon Brabançons decided to emigrate to Wisconsin. They thought they could lead an easier life there. They discovered a wild environment and difficult climatic conditions. They had to struggle to survive and, in some cases, to make a living. The Belgian colony of Wisconsin has already been the subject of numerous studies and publications. The recent discovery of a new correspondence, maintained by the Chaudoir family, allows us, today, to evoke their life in America. We do not reproduce here the entirety of the correspondence preserved, but only the parts of it that are of the greatest interest in the context of an article like this one. This correspondence, which covers the period 1873-1905, has only been partially preserved, but they bring exceptional information about the American fate of the Chaudoir family. You will only be reading these few excerpts that we have decided to publish in the contents of this article. Justin Chaudoir was far from mastering the French language perfectly and some of his sentences clearly show that his mother tongue was Walloon. His approach, which is very phonetic in the French language, makes us proud of the appearance of the original text, while preserving its archaic structure. As we can also see, over the years, Justin Chaudoir was influenced by the practice of English. Certain turns of French sentences also had to be changed.

Joseph Tordoir

## Handwritten letter translated to French:

1. Lettre de Justin Chaudoir au notaire Gustave Streel, de Beauvechain Union le 3 novembre 1873

## Monsieur le notaire,

Je vous écris ces quelques mots pour vous laisser savoir que nous sommes arrivés tous en bonne santé et que j'ai trouvé ma mère, frère et nièce. Tous jouissent du même bonheur. Je vous dirai que nous avons quitté le 12 juillet et que nous sommes arrivés à Green Bay le 12 août au soir. Mais nous avons resté 5 jours à Live1pool sans marcher et 1 à Lexington. Je vous assure que c'est un long voyage à faire. Nous avons resté 12 jours et 12 nuits sur l'eau. Pour moi, je croyais que l'avais bien resté 24 jours. Mais grâce à Dieu, nous sommes arrivés tous en bonne santé à part que moi j'ai été un peu malade sur l'eau, mais j'ai eu le bonheur que ni ma femme, ni mes enfants n'ont rien eu. Neuf cents personnes se trouvaient sur le bateau. C'est La lie qui a été la plus dure. Elle n'a jwnais perdu un repas. Elle avait beaucoup d'ouvrage avec les enfants et avec moi. Mais grâce à Dieu, je suis déjà content d'être venu. Je vois ici beaucoup plus d'avenir qu'en Belgique. C'est vrai, c'est travailler qu'il faut pour y venù~ mais pour nous c'est bien de voir qu'on peut se créer un avenir par le travail; en Belgique, c'est difficile. C'est difficile pour nous. Monsieur et Madame, je vous dirai que nous avons 47 bonniers de belle et bonne terre chargée de bois, tenant au lac et comme c'est une belle place et que nous voyons beaucoup d'argent à gagner, nous allons faire un quai pour y laisser venir les bateaux charger les cordes de bage. Nous allons faire cela entre nous deux mon frère Alexandre et nous espérons, avec la grâce de Dieu, gagner quelques centaines de dollars, mais pour commencer cela, il coûtera de 7 à 800 dollars. Nous allons commencer avec l'argent que nous avons ici et quand nous en aurons besoin, nous vous écrirons toujours un mois sur l'avance, de manière que vous arrangerez tout cela pour un mieux. Au temps voulu, faites le compte de ce que nous devons avoir de la récolte après que vous aurez payez le reste des terres, l'avocat et vos intérêts. Envoyez nous la note de ce qui reste et ce que nous pouvons laisser pour acquitter ce nous devons payer pour avoir eu l'argent avant le temps expiré. Et si vous voulez me quitter cela, je vous verrais encore plus volontiers (. . .).

## Handwritten letter translated to English

November 3, 1873

Mr. Streel,

I am writing to let you know that we have arrived all in good health and we have found my mother and brothers. All is well. I can tell you that we left our home on July 12th. We stayed five days in Liverpool before sailing. I assure you that it was a long journey to undertake. We stayed twelve days and twelve nights on the water. For me, it seemed like more. Nine hundred people were on the boat, and by the grace of God, we have arrived all in fine spirits. I was a bit sick on the water, but I was glad that neither my wife nor my children were ill. It is Lalie (wife) who was the strongest. She never lost a meal. She had a lot of work with the children and with me. But now, I am happy to have come to America. I see here a much better future than in Belgium. It is true there is work that must be done, but for me it is good to see that someone can create a future for himself through hard work. In Belgium it is difficult. Gustave, I will tell you that we have forty-seven bonniers (an amount of land) and beautiful woodlands, surrounding a lake. It is a beautiful place. We see much wealth to be won. We are going to make a dock to let boats come to load and unload cargo. I am going to make it with my brothers, and we hope to have a good income. To begin, it will cost hundreds of francs. We are going to use the money that we have brought here and if we need to, we will write to you, always a month in advance, for funds. That way you can arrange all this in the best way. We will also inform you of what we have earned from the harvest here. In the meantime, send us an accounting of what we have from the sale of our belongings in Belgium. With that, you will be paid on the remaining loan amount, and interest due on the advance. Send us a report of the balances and what we must pay to fulfill the note and make payment to you for your service. Justin Chaudoir

## Analysis from a Belgian linguist:

That script is a bit hard to read. But I can see that that person was struggling with French spelling, although said out loud the sentences do make sense.

He does say things like nous avons resté instead of nous sommes restés. That's a Wallonism

Walloon draws a clear line between a past event (to have + past participle) and a state (to be + past participle) whereas French has sort of blended the two in a past tense

That person's native language is clearly Walloon, although they can probably speak French orally. Most of the errors I've found were spelling mistakes. Basically, he wrote words phonetically or spelled them incorrectly (silent letters, plurals, etc.). I'm guessing he learned how to write French but not long enough to master all its subtelties. I'll give examples in the following comments.

Here are some examples of words spelled wrong but making perfect sense orally: Notair = notaire, ècrit = écrit, c'est quelque mot = ces quelques mots, niesse = nièce, diraiy = dirai, sen marchez = sans marcher, asur = assure, lon voiage = long voyage, 12 jour et 12 nui = 12 jours et 12 nuits, Grasse a Dieu = Grâce à Dieu, un peut = un peu.

Here are constructions that don't exist in French and are copied from Walloon: pour vous laissez savoir = pour vous faire savoir/informer ("po vos leyî sawè"), tout jouisant du maime Bonneur = en jouissant du même bonheur / qui jouissent du même bonheur ("tot" + present participle construction), en bon por = à bon port (not sure if this one is Walloon but the preposition is wrong), nous avon quité = nous sommes partis, nous avon restè = nous sommes restés (2x), j'avait bien restè 25 jour = j'étais bien resté 25 jours: in Walloon, the past simple tense tends to use the verb "to have" followed by a past participle, while a state is expressed with "to be"; in French the "passé composé" (translated in English as a past simple) is sometimes with "to have" (j'ai mangé = I ate), sometimes with "to be" (je suis resté = I stayed).